

Serving God



and Country

Story and Photos by Beth Reece



PICTURE war without someone to pray for soldiers' souls, birth without baptism or a marriage without the wedding ceremony.

"I can't imagine the Army without a chaplaincy. What we do in helping people connect with God lasts forever. It's eternal," said CSM Robin Rankin of the U.S. Army Chaplain Center and School at Fort Jackson, S.C.

More than 2,500 active-duty and reserve-component chaplains currently serve God and country by providing religious support to soldiers and families stationed around the world. They offer spiritual guidance in chapels, foxholes, dining facilities, motor pools and anywhere else soldiers feel a need for the presence of God.

☀ Training Army Chaplains

To become an Army chaplain, candidates must be ordained and obtain approval from their faith group's national headquarters. Chaplain candidates then spend three months in the Chaplain Officer Basic Course at USACHCS learning such skills as conducting military funerals, advising family support groups and providing religious services on the battlefield.

"Most chaplain candidates arrive here knowing they want to serve their country but not knowing anything about how the Army works," said USACHCS's commandant, Chaplain (COL) Hal Roller. "We have to teach them the fundamentals of soldiering — starting with how to wear the uniform — and at the same time instill in them the uniqueness of their jobs as military chaplains."

USACHCS instructors stress the ministry-of-presence concept.

"How many civilian pastors actually get to go to the factory with their parishioners? Deploying and training alongside soldiers not only enhances the Army ministry," Roller explained, "it *is* the ministry."

The basic course starts with combat-survival training and includes physical fitness, first aid, map reading, and day and night



Nella Hobson

Chaplain candidates at USACHCS learn the value of teamwork on the confidence course. Here, two candidates help another to the top of an obstacle.

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land navigation. Chaplain candidates also run confidence courses, rappel and learn to use protective gear during a trip to the gas chamber.

The transformation to military ministry continues with instruction on leadership, communication and counseling, Army writing and military history.

Though chaplains provide individual and family counseling, as do civilian clergy members, USACHCS helps students understand that soldiers’ trials often differ from those of civilian congregants.

“We deal with deployments and family separations, and sometimes we face life-and-death situations. Civilian pastors aren’t used to handling such hardships in their hometown parishes,” said chaplain candidate CPT Jim Stagers, a recent USACHCS graduate and National Guard member who leads a small rural church in Indiana.

With the U.S. military presence spread across the globe, chaplains must also advise commanders on religious and cultural issues prevalent

in numerous areas of operations. That means providing such details as soldiers’ proper dress when leaving the compound, and which days are considered holy by local religious custom.

“Back home in Oklahoma churches are far apart, and if one is bombed we’ll just build another. But some countries have shrines almost everywhere, and if you bomb a single one there can be major consequences,” said Chaplain (MAJ) Jo Ann Mann, an instructor for the basic course. “These factors are an important part of mission planning.”

Perform or Provide

Army chaplains are categorized into five faith groups: Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim and Orthodox. To show the wide span of each group,

PVT Shirley Irons shoots an azimuth. Land navigation is a vital skill for chaplain assistants, who must be able to get their chaplains to where they’re needed.



Nella Hobson



Like all soldiers, chaplains must be ready to face whatever conditions may exist in the field. The training at USACHCS helps ensure they have the necessary field skills.



Though they do not perform services or sacraments of denominations other than their own, chaplains coordinate religious support for soldiers of all faith groups.

Chaplain (LTC) Charles Howell, USACHCS' chief of officer training, noted that there are more than 1,600 Protestant denominations in America. Of 63 chaplain students attending a recent basic course, 35 denominations were represented.

The need to accept religious diversity is nonnegotiable for military chaplains. Though not required to compromise their individual faiths by performing services of other denominations, chaplains are required to arrange appropriate religious support for soldiers of all faith groups.

"If someone comes to me and says, 'Chaplain, I've got a crisis,' my first question is 'What is your faith group?' If he says he's Lutheran, I'm ready to talk. But if he says he's Roman Catholic I have the responsibility of putting that soldier in touch with a Catholic priest," said Chaplain (COL) Hank Steinhilber, the USACHCS director of training.

"So there's no evangelistic fervor

The Chaplain's Eyes and Ears

PFC Nathan Kane would follow his chaplain anywhere.

"If I were out there dying, I'd hope another chaplain assistant would have the strength to protect the chaplain's life at all costs so I could be comforted by someone of my faith," Kane said.

All Army chaplains are paired with an assistant whose main goal in combat is to keep the unarmed chaplain alive. Though assistants provide an array of support in garrison and field environments, much of their training focuses on wartime survival.

"Map reading and land navigation are two of the most important things for a chaplain assistant to know," said SFC Edgar Epps, an AIT instructor at the U.S. Army Chaplain Center and School at Fort Jackson, S.C. "If we can't read an eight- or six-digit grid coordinate and can't orient ourselves with the land, then we won't be able to get around. And if we can't get to where the soldiers are located, chaplains can't do their jobs."

Assistants are so crucial to the protection of chaplains' lives that even during field religious services they keep watch for approaching enemies.

But chaplain assistants are more than lifesavers, said Epps, who likes to think of assistants as a "conglomerate of professionals."

"We do logistics, finance, security and just about everything a headquarters company does. We possess many talents," he said.

In garrison, assistants prepare for services, safeguard privileged communication that passes between chaplains and those they counsel, maintain volunteer information, identify suicide risk factors, purchase chapel supplies and more. And since chaplain assistants are enlisted, they are often the first to be aware of problems in the unit.

"A chaplain assistant is the chaplain's eyes and ears," said MSG Linda Gandy, chief of enlisted training at the school. "A private is going to go to another private and a specialist is going to go to another specialist before they talk to the captain about what's on their minds. It's the buddy thing."

Chaplain assistants are taught to get out and mingle with other soldiers. "You can't stay in the office and be an effective chaplain assistant," Gandy added. "You have to be visible, and you have to get to know the people in the unit."

Most chaplain assistants join the Army with the desire to take care of other people, according to Epps.

"A lot of people still associate us with coffee and donuts after Sunday services," he said. "But we do one of the most important jobs in the Army. We help make way for people to practice their First Amendment right of religious freedom." — *Beth Reece*



PFC Peter Keith stands guard while his chaplain, who cannot carry arms, provides religious services.



Chaplains provide religious services in hospitals, motor pools, confinement facilities, field sites and anywhere else soldiers feel the need for pastoral guidance.

in the sense of stealing other people's sheep. If someone tells me they're Baptist, I want them to be the best Baptist they can be, so I help them get to a Baptist chaplain who can help work out whatever problems they have," Steinhilber added.

According to Mann, handling religious pluralism is a matter of treating other soldiers as she would like to be treated. She reminds chaplain candidates to reach out to the soldiers in their units and discover the unique needs of those who practice faiths other than their own.

"I remember getting ready for a training exercise in Korea when two Muslim soldiers came to me and said

they were concerned about being in the field during Ramadan," she said. "I admit I had no idea what Ramadan was at the time."

Learning that the two Muslim soldiers couldn't eat pork, salt or white flour, Mann arranged suitable meals through the unit's mess sergeant. She also encouraged the commander to place the two soldiers in the same location during the exercise so they could observe their religious traditions together.

"If I hadn't been there, I don't know who would've spoken for the soldiers. There's a tendency to blow people off when they're different," Mann said. "But I was able to offer the

expression that the Army took their faith seriously. It's an incredible thing when someone helps you affirm and practice your faith, even though it's not their own."

Jewish Chaplain (CPT) Henry Soussan is a recent USACHCS graduate, currently stationed at Fort Sill, Okla. One of several foreign nationals who've joined the Army Chaplaincy, the German native said he feels free to express his views in the Army, and gladly pledges to support soldiers of all faith groups.

"I don't think there's anything like this in the world, where there is such a degree of pluralism and culturalism," he said. "The chaplain program shows

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The Human Dimension

Chaplains are sought for their compassion and unbiased views. Their advice is frequently solicited by commanders who struggle with questions of how to best discipline soldiers.

"A commander will say, 'Tell me the part I can't see. Why shouldn't I 'burn' this soldier? Why shouldn't I kick this soldier out of the Army? Why shouldn't we shell that hospital the enemy is using as a shelter?'" said Howell.

Since chaplains do not bear arms, in accordance with the Geneva Convention, soldiers may wonder why the Army doesn't simply contract civilian clergy to provide religious support.

"The most critical time in a person's life is when they're being shot at, and that's when you really can't get local Sunday school teachers or pastors to drop what they're doing and jump into the trenches," Howell said.



Chaplain assistants prepare for services in both garrison and field environments, helping ensure that the religious experience is as meaningful as possible.

Army chaplains also help counter the destruction and hatred soldiers sometimes face in combat. By helping soldiers understand the ethics of what they do in war, chaplains offer soldiers a healthy perspective on right and wrong, said Chaplain (MAJ) Randall Dolinger, senior instructor for the USACHCS Chaplain Career Course, which is attended by chaplains who've served for five or more years.

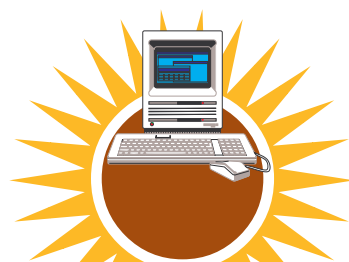
"We help them make the distinction that, yes, they fired a weapon; yes, they killed someone. But they did it in combat for a reason which doesn't exist at home," he said.

Some may question whether military and religious values are contradictory, but the school's commandant points out that Army values are an expression of religious values.

"Religion is a part of humanity. It defines our nature and who we are, and it's always been a foundation of American society," Roller said. "To be without the chaplaincy would leave a tremendous void in the American Army." □



A chaplain's guidance can help soldiers understand the ethics of what they do in war, and offer them a healthy perspective on right and wrong.



To learn more about becoming an Army chaplain, visit
<http://chaplain.goarmy.com>.